

Economic Status of the Weaker Sections –An Empirical Study of Mehander Tehsil of District Poonch

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Abstract: Recently in the 12th five year plan of India the focus has been to ensure faster inclusive and sustainable development which means that all the sections of the society have to enjoy the fruits of development on a sustainable basis. Since ST and SC and OBCs are among the weaker and vulnerable sections of the society therefore the issues pertaining to them are worth investigating. The objectives of the present study are: to ascertain the Demographic profile of the weaker sections of the society in the border area, to examine the nature of their occupation, their income and expenditure & to investigate the problems being faced by them. The present study is based on secondary & primary sources. The secondary data has been collected from the Ministry of tribal affairs, annual reports, Journals, etc. For the conducting the primary study district Poonch from Jammu and Kashmir State has been selected. The data has been collected on a well-structured questionnaire through personal interview method. After the collection of the data it has been tabulated and analyzed with simple statistical tools. The literacy rate is lower among ST's and their economy to a considerable extent depends on dairy farming, cattle rearing and agriculture. So far as the living conditions are concerned 30 percent of ST households had (kula/Kotha) kuchha houses, 45 percent semi-pacca, 25 percent pacca houses. In case of Non-ST households 25 percent had Kuchha, 27.5 percent semi-pacca & 47.5 percent had pacca, houses. The living condition of Non-ST households has been better in comparison to that of STs. The ST and Non-ST households in the study area have been facing a number of problems and are lacking basic amenities in their life.

Key Words: 1. Weaker sections 2. Livestock 3. Living conditions 4. Human Development 5. Basic amenities.

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Despite the sustained and renewed efforts by the country since more than a third of India's total population fall in below poverty line (BPL) category which means the country is the home for one third of the poor in the World. Economic development of a nation clearly contributes to economic status of its population when it enlarges the capabilities and enriches the lives of people without adversely affecting the well-being of others. The concept of growth with social justice has been the basic philosophy of development underlying Indian Economic Planning & accordingly all development programs in India have laid special stress upon the upliftment of the weaker sections. Among the various weaker sections scheduled tribes & scheduled castes are the worst sufferers. According to the census of 2011, in India SC population is 16.2 percent and ST is 8.2 percent of total population. In Jammu and Kashmir it is 7.6 percent and 10.9 percent of total population. The goal of the inclusive growth and sustainable development cannot be achieved unless and until, the weaker and vulnerable sections of society such as scheduled tribes & scheduled castes & other backward categories are included in the process of economic growth and development. Since STs and SCs and OBCs have been the weaker and vulnerable sections of the society among Non-STs, therefore the economic issues pertaining to them are of worth investigating. The economic status of a society or community refers to its position as to where it stands on the ladder of financial position. Most important

determinants of economic status of a society or community are its per capita income, the standard of living, the level of consumption etc. A number of sociologists, Anthropologists, political, theoreticians and economists have conducted a lot of empirical research on the different dimensions of socio-economic conditions of the weaker and vulnerable sections of the society living in different parts of India. From the review of literature it has been found that there are lots of gaps at regional and national levels in the studies pertaining to the weaker & vulnerable sections of the society, while highlighting their social economic status . Keeping this in view ,the present study tries to investigate the socio-economic conditions of the settled weaker & vulnerable sections of the border area (Scheduled tribes & Non-Scheduled tribes) in District Poonch of Jammu and Kashmir State of India.

Objectives& Methodology: To examine the insights of the evolutionary changes in the socio-economic conditions of the weaker sections in the Border Area of District Poonch, the objectives of the present study are, to ascertain the Demographic profile of the weaker sections of the society in the border area, to examine the nature of their occupation, their income and expenditure & to investigate the problems being faced by them. The present study is based on secondary & primary sources. The secondary data has been collected from the Ministry of tribal affairs, annual reports, Journals, etc. For the conducting the primary study district Poonch from Jammu and Kashmir State has been selected. From six Blocks of District Poonch (prior to formation of new administrative units), Mendhar Block, has been selected through purposive sampling techniques & out of total 57 inhabited villages of Mendhar only four villages which are nearer to border area up to 5km have been selected through the purposive sampling techniques (such as, 1 ,Bhatidhar,2,Ghani,3,Ari,4,Jugal)selecting 20 households from each village (including 10 ST (settled) and 10 Non-ST (such as SC& OBC) comprising community)through purposive sampling techniques for the collection of the data on a well-structured questionnaire through personal interview method. After the collection of the data it has been tabulated and analyzed with simple statistical tools.

Findings of the study: Demographic profile of the households under study, reveals that the percentage of female population among Scheduled tribe& Non- Scheduled tribe households has been relatively less than its male population. Apart from this the total sex ratio among STs has been 857.14 & among Non-STs it has been 833.33 which is lower than state average 883(2011 census) and national average 940(2011 census)which reveals the preference for male child among the households under study .The size of family has been large among Scheduled tribe than in case of Non- Scheduled tribe households because of their nature of occupation. Discrimination with girl child, domestic violence, Low level of education,female feticide are some of the reasons for poor sex ratio among the households under study.

The total population of the sampled households under study has been 515, of which 279 are males and 236 are females. The sex ratio has been higher for the age group of 25-40 years & is 973.68 which speaks of improvement in medical facilities at the time of people of this age group age group than their counterparts who were in the age group of 40-60 years & have a sex ratio of 731.70, lower than the national and state average. So far as the religion is concerned 100 percent of ST belong to Muslim religion & among Non-ST 80 percent belong to OBCs (all have Muslim religion)whereas 17.5 percent are Hindu & belong to Scheduled caste and 2.5 percent belong to Sikh religion .

With regard to nature of family: it has been found that among ST households 70 percent were having joint and 30 percent nuclear family whereas in case of Non-ST 72.5 percent had nuclear and 27.5 percent joint family. Nuclear family system is more prevalent among Non-Scheduled tribes Joint family system is still dominating among STs because of their nature of work. So far as the family size of schedule tribe households is concerned ,22.5 percent had a family size of 10 and above members,52.5 percent of 6-9 members,25 percent of 3-5 members respectively. In case of Non-STs ,15 percent of households had a family size of 10&above members,67.5 percent of 6-9 members & 17.5 percent households of 3-5 members respectively. Thus size of family among ST households has been larger in comparison to that of Non-ST households. So far as the living conditions are concerned 30 percent of

ST households had (kula/Kotha) kuchha, 45 percent semi-pacca, 25 percent pacca houses. In case of Non-STs 25 percent had Kuchha, 27.5 percent semi-pacca & 47.5 percent had pacca houses. The living condition of Non-STs was found relatively better. When asked about other fixed assets such as land, shops and other establishments, it has been found that 70 percent of the respondents from both the communities were not ready to provide exact information regarding this. But when asked about irrigated and unirrigated land, it has been found that 55 percent of STs had unirrigated land and 45 percent had irrigated land. In case of Non-STs 65 percent were having irrigated and 35 percent unirrigated land. Non-STs had large size of Irrigated land in comparison to STs, having a considerable impact on their agricultural production & income. So far as the cropping pattern in the study area is concerned, among schedule tribes it has been found that no household is raising single crops, 75 percent of the households used to raise two crops and 25 percent of them go for multiple cropping annually. In case of the non-schedule tribes households 55 percent raise two crops and 45 percent go for multiple cropping in a year. Thus diversification in the cropping pattern has been found in the study area, which is necessary for sustainable development. So far as moveable assets are concerned among ST households 55 percent had bicycle's/ two wheelers, 25 percent T.V. sets, 12.5 LPG stove, 7.5 percent other assets such as radio/watches/cookers, 5 percent fridge/ coolers, 98 percent of them had mobile phones. Among Non-STs 60 percent were having bicycle's/ two wheelers, 20 percent LPG stoves, 40 percent T.V. sets, 10 percent fridge/coolers and 95 percent had mobile phones. No doubt they are lending money to others but no one among the sampled households has revealed the ownership of four wheeler. Besides this, the government banks also provide loan at subsidized rates for the purchase of vehicles especially to the weaker sections for transporting milk, feed fodder but no one has revealed the ownership of vehicle through this mode. Among the Schedule tribe households 35 percent had access to the safe drinking water and latrine facility within their premises and 65 percent households do not enjoy this facility, whereas among non-schedule tribe households, 45 percent had clean drinking water and latrine facility within their premises and 55 percent had no such facility. Those who lacked these facilities have to cover a long distance to fetch drinking water from rivers, ponds, natural springs (between 1 to 5 kms) and to go in open places to attend the natural calls, causing a no. of diseases among females & girl child because of long wait for wee hours or evening hours. The electricity facility has been available to every household under study. But frequent power cuts were reported by the respondents. Regarding medical & health facilities 32.5 percent of ST households had access to primary health centers (PHCs) at close proximity and 67.5 percent had access to this institution at a distance of 3-5Kms. Among Non-ST households 42.5 percent had access to PHCs at close proximity and 57 percent at a distance of 3-5Kms. According to the elderly people earlier the access to health facilities in comparison to past period has improved. The literacy rate among the schedule tribes has been 75 percent of which 50 percent were literate up to middle level, 25 percent up to matric level, 15 percent up to secondary level, 8 percent up to graduation and 2 percent up to P.G. level. Among non-schedule tribes the literacy rate found was 80 percent, of which 45 percent were literate up to matric level, 35 percent up to secondary level, 15 percent up to U.G. level and 5 percent up to P.G. level, showing higher rate of literacy among Non-schedule tribe households.

The availability of economic opportunities leads to social and economic inclusion. It is the economy of any community which is an important determinant of growth and development of that community in particular and region, state and nation in general. Regarding the occupational status in the study area, it has been found that 55 percent of ST households were having dairy farming and cattle rearing, 25 percent had agriculture, 7.5 percent of each as casual worker and money lender and 5 percent as government employment as main occupation. Among Non-ST households 27.5 percent had agriculture 22.5 percent as Govt. employment, 17.5 percent as poultry, 15 percent as dairy farming and cattle rearing, 12.5 percent as money lending and 5 percent had casual work as their main occupation. Thus the main occupation of ST households, has been dairy farming and cattle rearing. By selling their milk/ milk products and livestock they raise money for their livelihood. One of the important findings of this study is that 7.5 percent of ST and 12.5 percent of Non-ST households were lending money and treating interest has been a source of income for them, which also

highlights their sound economic condition but they do not prefer to deposit money in banks & post offices because of cumbersome processes involved there in. Those who go for dairy farming & cattle rearing, have to face the shortage of fodder during rainy seasons, apart from this while grazing their cattle when they go deep inside the forest their animals are being killed by the lions and other wild animals. At the same note due to overgrazing beyond the carrying capacity of the grazing fields, they are adding pressure on the forest cover & natural resources .

Table1.1: Total Income of all the Households, under study.

Sources of Income	Scheduled tribe households No.	Total annual income of Scheduled tribes (RS)	Non-Scheduled tribes households No.	Total annual income of non-Scheduled tribes (RS)	Total Households No.	Total income (RS)
Agriculture	10 (25)	1076000 (27.82)	11 (27.5)	1544000 (31.84)	21 (26.25)	2620000 (30.06)
Dairy farming and cattle rearing	22 (55)	1679000 (43.41)	6 (15)	86000 (1.77)	28 (35)	1765000 (20.25)
Poultry	0	-	7 (17.5)	196000 (4.04)	7 (8.75)	196000 (2.25)
Wages income	3 (7.5)	178600 (4.62)	2 (5)	96000 (1.98)	5 (6.25)	274600 (3.15)
Salary income	2 (50)	866000 (22.39)	9 (22.5)	2780000 (57.34)	11 (13.75)	3646000 (41.83)
Income through Interest	3 (7.5)	68000 (1.76)	5 (10)	60000 (1.24)	8 (10)	128000 (1.47)
Total	40 (100)	3867600 (100)	40 (100)	4848000 (100)	80 (100)	8715600 (100)

Source: Survey data (2016)

(Figures within brackets shows the Percentage)

The standard of living of households can be understood from the level of income from their occupations . Dairy farming and cattle rearing has been the main source of income of STs and 43.41 percent of their total income comes out of this, 27.82 percent of income from agriculture ,22.39 from salary,4.62 from wages and 1.76 percent of income comes in the form of interest earned .The share of salary in total income of the non-scheduled tribes has been41.83 ,of agriculture 30.06 percent, of dairy farming and cattle rearing 20.25 percent, of wage income 4.62 percent, of poultry 2.25 percent and 1.47 percent of total income has been in the form of interest earnings.Thus the economy of ST households is heavily dependent on dairy farming, cattle rearing and agriculture and of Non-STs heavily dependent on government employment and agriculture.The total annual income of ST households has been Rs.3867600 &of Non-STs Rs.4848000 & the average annual income of STs has been Rs.96,690 and of Non-STs Rs.121200. The average monthly income of ST household has been lower (Rs.8057.5)in comparison to that of Non-STs (Rs.10100) where less number of households are government employee.

Table1.2: Total Annual Expenditure of all the Households on Food & Non –food Items. (Rs)

Expenditure	SCsTotal	SCsTotal	Total
Expenditure on food items	3512487(68.11)	2463844(62.25)	5976331(65.56)
Expenditure on non-food items	1644491(31.88)	1493706(37.74)	3138197(34.43)
Total	5156978(100)	3957550(100)	9114528(100)

Source: Survey data (2016)

(Figures within brackets shows the Percentage).

So far as the total annual expenditure is concerned it has been found that SC households were spending 68.11 percent on food items & 31.88 percent of total annual expenditure on non-food items. Among Non-ST households it has been 62.25 & 37.74 percent, showing that the expenditure on non-food items has been higher among Non-ST households because of their higher earnings. All the households under study were spending a major proportion of their income on food items. Among the schedule tribes, 35 percent of the households stated that they do save and 65 percent had no saving. Among Non-STs, 55 percent had savings and 45 percent had no savings. The tendency to save is higher among Non-STs than among STs.

Problems & Suggestions: Both the communities in the Border area of district Poonch have been facing a number of problems and are lacking basic amenities in their life. 75 percent of ST households are still living in kotha /kula/ semi-kachha houses, with no suitable environment for their children to study and other social norms. Among non-schedule tribes, no respondent was found to be living in kula or kotha or in a single room.

65 & 55 percent of the households among the ST & Non-ST have been lacking the drinking water within the premises of their households & have to fetch the water from long distance & in this process they waste a lot of their time. Besides the school going age group children are being sent by their parents to fetch water, thereby wasting the time of their studies. 52.5 percent of the scheduled tribes and 42.5 percent of the Non-ST households have to go in open places for latrine with always at a risk during rainy season to their life. Women are prone to a number of diseases and have to face a number of problems when they go in open places. Lack of toilet facility also leads to crime against girls and women and even children.

Due to lack of primary health center in their nearby areas & absenteeism of staff in the existing one, some of the serious patients have died (while shifting them) in their way to Tehsil /District level Hospital. There is dearth of Veterinary facilities in these villages causing loss to the poultry and the livestock. Lack of supply of ration on a regular basis under public distribution system (PDS) & its poor quality is one of the major problem being faced by these communities. Cross-border firing in this border area is disturbing the living and working conditions of the households under study. Those who are dependent on livestock as an occupation, get low prices for their milk & milk products as compared to the market prices because a number of intermediaries are involved in the purchase & sale of these products.

Housing Facilities should be provided to the respondents at subsidized rates & the people should be made aware of various schemes like Indira Awas yojana, Border Area Development Programme and other benefits for the construction of their houses & toilets. A wider publicity should be given to these schemes at block, panchayat and village level. Information about various scholarship schemes should be given to the member of panchayats, parents and to the students so as to improve the literacy rate. There is a

immense need to ensure the regular availability of the doctors and supporting staff in the Primary health centers, to improve their functioning. Besides this more primary health centers & veterinary dispensaries should be opened in close proximity in the study area. The road connectivity to these villages should be improved & new roads under different schemes should be constructed to improve upon the connectivity. Availability of water should be ensured through boring of more tube wells in the respective villages under different government schemes & connecting the study area with new water pipes under Public Health Engineering. The planning of welfare programs should be strictly made by taking into account the local demands & be executed at local level. Institutional arrangement for supply of feed and disease control of cattle and marketing of milk products needs to be carried out to improve the level of income of the respondents. Keeping in view the problems of the households under study, a multi pronged strategy should be adopted improve their socio economic conditions.

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